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THE
GREAT COMMISSION

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HENRY W. FROST





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THE GREAT COMMISSION

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THE GREAT COMMISSION

BY
HENRY W. FROST



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A FOREWORD

THIS study of the Great Commission has been written with the hope that it will prove helpful to some young men and women who are seeking to ascertain the will and way of God. It is put forth with the prayer that its words may lead not a few of these to surrender their lives to Christ and follow Him to the uttermost part of the earth.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

CHAPTER I

THE COMMISSION DEFINED

THE Great Commission is that series of commandments which Christ gave to His apostles and disciples enjoining them to evangelize the peoples of the world.

Broadly speaking, the Commission includes and consists of, first, the commandments given to the Seventy and Twelve, previous to the crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 10: 5-20; Mark 6: 7-11; Luke 9: 1-5; 10: 1-12, 19); second, those given to the Twelve and other disciples, subsequent to the resurrection and during the forty days prior to the ascension (Matt. 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 15-18; Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:6-8); and third, those given to the Apostle Paul, subsequent to the ascension (Acts 9: 1-18; 22: 6-21; 23: 11; 26:12-18; 27: 23, 24).

Strictly speaking—as generally understood—the Commission consists of the commandments given to the Twelve and other disciples, during the forty days after the resurrection and before the ascension (Matt. 28: 16-20; Mark 16: 15-18; Luke 24: 36-49; John 20: 19-23).

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CHAPTER II

THE SCRIPTURAL PRESENTATION

A CLOSE study of the Commission as it is presented in the New Testament reveals several facts; first, it can not be regarded as an originally unbroken whole, for it is made up of a number of separate parts, any one of which is complete in itself and each of which reveals items of difference and distinction; second, the chronological order of the several parts is not that of the sequence of the books of the New Testament; third, the various parts must be considered first, as independent of one another and then, as related to one another; and fourth, the whole, as thus adjusted and connected, forms a spiritual unity. In pursuing our study, it is to be acknowledged that the harmonization of the various parts of the Commission is a difficult task. But also, it is to be recognized that it is not an impossible one. This last is true because there are both outer and inner indications which suggest how the adjustment can be made. It is important to discover and obtain a harmonization, for it is this which gives us the great Commission as a whole.

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CHAPTER III

THE COMMISSION ANALYZED

IT IS clear that the several parts of the Commission contain individual characteristics and that it is these which constitute the existing differences. These may be expressed as follows: first, the times in which the commandments were given; second, the places in which they were spoken; third, the persons to whom they were addressed; fourth, the subject matter which they contain; and fifth, the special purposes for which they were presented. These five distinctions give to us a suitable analysis of our subject, and we shall develop our thought concerning it along the lines thus suggested.

CHAPTER IV

THE TIME ELEMENT

WHILE most of the various portions of the Commission are found in the four Gospels, their chronological sequence is not according to the order of those books. That is, it can not be said that there are, say, four parts, and that the first is in Matthew, the second in Mark, the third in Luke, and the fourth in John. Indeed, the sequence of the parts is quite different from this, it being almost a case where the first is last and

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the last first. In other words, the chronology of the Gospel portions which contain the Commission must first be established, and then the time of Christ's utterances in this chronological scheme be determined.

Happily, the undertaking of fixing these times is easier of accomplishment than one might anticipate, for the fact—according to common agreement—that the Commission is chiefly made up of the commandments of Christ which were given after the resurrection and before the ascension reduces the period to be considered to that of the forty days (Acts 1: 3). At the same time this does not altogether solve the existing difficulty, for it does not determine the order of the events which took place within that period. Many episodes occurred during the forty days, and the problem of discovering the sequence of these remains.

Having regard to the chronology of the forty-day period, it is to be noted that much help in determining this is obtained by giving attention to the presentation made by Paul concerning the resurrection appearances of Christ—this because the Commission is directly connected with some of these manifestations. This is particularly true in view of the fact that the apostle sets forth a nearly complete record of the appearances and

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does this according to the order of their occurrence.

The record given by Paul is as follows: first, to Cephas; second, to the Twelve; third, to the five hundred brethren; fourth, to James; fifth, to all of the apostles; and sixth, to himself (1 Cor. 15: 5-7).

Adding to the above list the further revelation of the Gospels, it becomes possible to make a full and orderly statement of the appearances. Leaving out the one which is related to Paul, these are as follows: first, to Mary Magdelene (John 20: 1-17); second, to other women (Matt. 28: 8, 9, R. V.); third, to Simon (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15: 5); fourth, to Cleopas and another disciple (Luke 24: 13-32); fifth, to ten apostles (John 20: 19-23); sixth, to the eleven apostles (Luke 24: 33-36; John 20:26-29); seventh, to seven apostles, or possibly, five apostles and two disciples (John 21:1-4); eighth, to the eleven apostles and five hundred disciples, or possibly, to the eleven apostles and four hundred and eighty-nine disciples (Matt. 28: 7, 10, 16; 1 Cor. 15:6); ninth, to James (1 Cor. 15:7); and tenth, to the eleven apostles (Luke 24: 50, 51; Acts 1: 6-12). Among these ten appearances is a certain number during which Christ proclaimed His missionary commands.

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It is difficult to specify, even with the full scriptural statement of the appearances before us, on what day of the forty days each of the messages was given. The time of the first two is certain, and also that of the last, for the Gospels state that the first two were on the day of the resurrection and the last one on that of the ascension. But the times of the intermediate messages are mostly indeterminable, the Scripture simply using the words "after" or "afterwards" without specifying the day. This last, however, is not particularly important. That which is specially important is the matter of which we may be sure, namely, the sequence of the several appearances. The order of these, we are confident, is the one which has been given.

The Gospels make it plain that the various parts of the Commission were given upon separate occasions, and this suggests when the particular appearances which were connected with these took place. This last makes it unnecessary to consider all of the appearances. In fact, as we shall see, only three of the manifestations need chronological determination.

The First Part

Christ rose from the dead on the morning of the first day of the week (Matt. 28: 1-6) and that

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day, in consequence, became known as "the Lord's day" (Acts 20: 7; 1 Cor. 16: 1, 2). On the evening of that day, while ten of the apostles—Judas being dead and Thomas being absent—were gathered together, Jesus appeared in their midst. He then gave to them this commandment: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20: 19-21), the divine interpretation of which saying is found in John 3: 16. This was Christ's first utterance concerning the evangelization of the world.

Thus the words quoted constitute the first portion of the Great Commission. And, as we have just pointed out, the time upon which the commandment was presented was the evening of the first Lord's day, that is, the first of the forty days.

The Second Part

Cleopas and another disciple, after the resurrection, had left Jerusalem and taken their way to their home in the village of Emmaus. Jesus met them upon their way and later in their house revealed Himself to them in the breaking of bread. Though it was then late evening, the two disciples immediately turned back to Jerusalem—a distance of threescore furlongs or six and a half miles—and sought the other disciples in order to tell them how Jesus had

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appeared and showed Himself to them. It was while they were thus gathered together—it must have been about midnight—that Christ suddenly stood in the room where they were. And it was under these circumstances that He supplemented the commandment recorded by John, to which reference has been made, and, by so doing, completed His previous utterance concerning the evangelization of the world. His words are these: “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24: 46, 47). Following this, He made this declaration, “Ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24: 48).

Thus we have the second portion of the Great Commission. It was given on the first day of the week, on that one upon which Christ had risen from the dead, and it was spoken at the hour of midnight.

The Third Part

Christ at His first appearing had made an appointment with the apostles and other disciples to meet them upon a mountain in Galilee. The purpose which the Lord had in this visitation seems to have been that of demonstrating to a

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general and large company of disciples the certainty of His resurrection (Matt. 28: 8-10, 16, 17). But it is evident that He had another and even more important purpose in view. As Christ saw things, His resurrection meant His fulness of life; this fulness meant a new and peculiar relationship with His disciples; and this relationship meant His complete and lasting lordship over them. It was thus that Christ passed easily from manifestation to mandate. Under these circumstances Christ gave forth the third part of the Commission. This portion is found in Matthew and reads as follows: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28: 18-20).

On what day the Galilean appearing which led to the above pronouncement took place, it is impossible to say. From the standpoint of analogy, we should judge that it was upon a Lord's day, and the Gospels seem to indicate that it was upon the afternoon of one of the Sundays which lay somewhere in the midst of the forty days. A

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few commentators hold that this appearing occurred upon the day of the ascension, that is, upon the last of the forty days. We doubt the correctness of this conclusion and are inclined to think that the time was either upon the second or third Lord's day following the resurrection. However, this must remain uncertain. The one thing as to the time about which we may be assured is that the appearing and proclamation took place subsequent to the first appearing and prior to the last one.

The Fourth Part

It appears that following the time of the resurrection there was a general state of unbelief on the part of the disciples and even the apostles. Mark tells us that Christ rebuked the apostles for their unbelief and hardness of heart because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen (Mark 16: 14); and Matthew informs us that this lack of faith persisted even into the Galilean experience when some worshipped Him and "some doubted," or, more literally, wavered, or hesitated (Matt. 28: 17). As to this last, it appears, from the standpoint of the original Greek, that there was a general prostration before Christ as He appeared on the mountain side—the word "worshipped" (*prosekunesan*)

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implies this—but that some of the disciples questioned, not so much the reality of Christ's person and presence, for they all had gone to Galilee to see Him, as the fact of His physical embodiment and His being worthy of such worship as is offered only to Deity. There in Galilee, Jesus rebuked this lack of faith and sought to correct it by declaring, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28: 18). But it is evident that unbelief died hard and that some among the disciples continued to doubt. And it appears that this was the spiritual condition which called for a new manifestation on the part of Christ and a fresh declaration as to His position and power. Hence it is that we have the fourth portion of His mandate concerning the evangelization of the world. This runs as follows: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16: 15-18).

In respect to the time of the above-mentioned

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appearing and declaration, there can be no uncertainty. For Luke tells us that the space between the resurrection and ascension was forty days (Acts 1:3), and that the manifestation here in mind was upon the last of these days. This indicates that the appearing and declaration occurred upon that day of the week which we now call Thursday, namely, the sixth one after the day of the resurrection. There may be, therefore, a certitude to the effect that the fourth portion of the Great Commission was pronounced upon the last Thursday in the forty days, which was the day of the ascension.

The Fifth Part

The book of the Acts leaves no doubt as to the occasion when Christ made His fifth pronouncement relative to world evangelization. The apostles were gathered about their Master's person to have what turned out to be their final interview with Him. It was thus that they asked of Christ their last question, and He gave to them His last answer. As to the question, the apostles had noted that Jesus in His various prophetic utterances had not said when He would restore the kingdom to Israel, and, since this subject was uppermost in their thoughts, they pressed for information concerning it (Acts

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1: 6). As to the answer, Christ did not say that He would not restore the kingdom to Israel, but only this, that a definite service had to precede the restoration, which would be preparatory to it (Acts 1: 7, 8). It was in this way that He uttered the fifth and final portion of the Commission. This He did in the following words: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8).

The Acts makes the time of the foregoing pronouncement as clear as the occasion of it. For the Holy Spirit in the record declares, "When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (Acts 1: 9). In other words, Christ made His declaration immediately preceding His ascension. This clarification serves a double purpose: it not only fixes the time of the fifth declaration, but also that of the fourth. That this is the fact is evident from the following: both the fourth and fifth pronouncements were made upon the day of the ascension; the one recorded in the Acts was the later of the two; and hence, the one recorded in Mark was the earlier. We may confidently state then, that the

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order of the three events was as follows: first, the fourth portion of the Commission (Mark 16: 15-18); second, the fifth portion (Acts 1: 8); and third, the ascension (Acts 1: 9). This fifth part of the Commission then, supplements and complements the whole.

We thus come to the completion of the Commission and ascertain the times—as far as these may be discovered—when its various portions were given. We may make, therefore, the following summary: the Great Commission is made up of five parts; these were delivered upon three separate occasions; two of these were spoken upon a Lord's day, one, probably, upon another Lord's day, and two upon a week day; the first and second were given upon the first Lord's day, that is, upon the day of the resurrection; the third was pronounced upon an unascertained day lying somewhere in the midst of the forty days; and the fourth and fifth were enunciated upon the sixth Thursday after the resurrection, that is, upon the day of the ascension.

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CHAPTER V

THE PLACE ELEMENT

ON reaching this second portion of the analysis by which we are being governed, namely, the various places where the five parts of the Commission were delivered, we find the facts more certain than they were in respect to the various times which are involved. In other words, the Gospels and Acts are more explicit in respect to the geography of the occasions of the proclamation than in regard to the chronology.

The First Part

The crucifixion took place outside of the walls of Jerusalem and it was in the place of the crucifying that there was a garden tomb in which Christ was buried (John 19: 38-42). Hence, the resurrection occurred beyond the walls of Jerusalem. And it was at the sepulchre thus located that the earliest manifestations were made. But it was not outside of the walls of the city but within them that Christ first met with the apostolic company. These disciples, with the exception of Thomas, had fled affrighted to the upper room of some familiar house and had there locked themselves in for fear of the Jews, not understanding Christ's prophecies concerning

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His reappearing and not believing that He was risen from the dead (Mark 16: 14); Luke 24: 36-45; John 20: 19, 20). It was there and thus that Christ showed Himself to the apostles and gave to them the first part of the Commission (John 20: 19-23).

The Second Part

The second part of the Commission, except for its content, was a continuation of the first, for it was given in the same place and on the same day, though at a later time of the day. We may understand, therefore, that the second portion was pronounced at Jerusalem, and in some upper room in that city (Luke 24: 33-36).

The Third Part

We are specifically told in several scriptures that the next pronouncement took place in Galilee and upon a mountain there (Matt. 26: 32; 28: 7, 10, 16; Mark 14: 28; 16: 7). As to which this mountain was, the Scriptures are silent (Matt. 28: 16). Some commentators think that it was the high slope behind Capernaum. But others hold that it was Mount Tabor. From the standpoint of recognizing that Capernaum, with its hilly environs, was a frequent gathering place for Christ and the apostles, we should be inclined

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to favor the former surmise. But the slopes back of Capernaum are hills and not mountains, and the specification which Jesus made seems to signify a conspicuous and well-known elevation—in the original Greek the phrase is “*the* mountain”—and this, Mount Tabor was. This appears to indicate that Tabor was the place of meeting. But where the Scripture is silent, interpretation is conjectural and not sure. However, the place of gathering was in Galilee, and it was on the incline of one of its mountains that the “five hundred brethren” met their resurrected Lord, bowed in His holy presence (Matt. 28: 16; 1 Cor. 15:6), and heard His missionary pronouncement. This last formed the third part of the Commission (Matt. 28: 16-20).

The Fourth Part

It is evident, after the Galilean experience, that the apostles returned to Jerusalem and consorted together in probably the same upper room which had already been hallowed by the presence of the resurrected Christ (John 20: 19). It was in this room that the Lord next revealed Himself to the company of apostles, this upon the last of the forty days. We judge that the manifestation was made in the early evening, for the apostles “sat at meat,” which presumably was the evening meal

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of the day (Mark 16: 14). Here, in the solemn silence of that evening hour, Christ gave the fourth part of the Commission (Mark 16: 14-18).

The Fifth Part

From the upper room in Jerusalem, Christ led His apostles forth—as so often before, but now for the last time—to the Mount of Olives, toward Bethany (Luke 24: 50). In these hallowed surroundings He spoke to them once more, revealing His will for them in coming days and the service which they would be called upon to render. This was the fifth part of the Commission and the last pronouncement which Christ made—except as He spoke to Paul—as touching a world evangelization (Acts 1:4-9).

CHAPTER VI

THE PERSONNEL ELEMENT

It is plain from the Gospels that Christ kept to the order of procedure during the forty days of His resurrection appearances which had characterized His ministry for the three and a half years prior to His crucifixion. With Him, as with Paul, it was always the Jew first and afterwards the Gentile (Matt. 10: 5, 6; Rom. 1: 16; 2: 9, 10).

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And here it was exclusively the Jew, though various parts of His Commission indicate that His mind and heart were going far beyond that people (Matt. 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; Luke 24: 47; Acts 1: 8). It was to the Jewish apostles and disciples, therefore, that His manifestations were made. There was a special reason for this exclusiveness. Christ had come to offer the Messianic kingdom to the Jewish nation (Luke 1: 30-33) and, from first to last, kept this objective before Him. It was thus, even in the forty days, that He dealt with Jews and only Jews. As said, His prophetic eye saw far beyond the Jews to the Gentile nations and He knew the day would come when the divine favor would be granted to these. But for the present, until the Jewish people had had their full chance and had rejected it, He would hold resolutely to His proffer of the kingdom, to the Jews and through the Jews.

The First Part

The first portion of the Commission, as we have seen, was given on the evening of the day of the resurrection, in some upper room in Jerusalem. We would now note that the Jewish apostles were the only persons present, ten of them, for Judas had killed himself, and

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Thomas—presumably in abject fear—was hiding in some unknown place (John 20: 19-25).

The Second Part

The second part of the Commission was a continuation of the first and its pronouncement was made in the same place, that is, in Jerusalem and in some upper room. The audience, once more, was made up of the ten Jewish apostles (Luke 24: 36-48; John 20: 19-25).

The Third Part

The third part of the Commission, as has been pointed out, was delivered upon some mountain side in the province of Galilee. The company gathered together was a large one, there being some five hundred disciples present (1 Cor. 15: 6). There is no intimation in the Scriptures that any Gentiles were in the gathering, and besides, up to that time, Christ's converts were almost exclusively Jewish, for which reasons we may safely conclude that all of the "brethren" mentioned were Jews. This would include the eleven apostles and a general company of disciples gathered from Judea and Galilee (Matt. 26: 32; 28: 7, 10, 16; Mark 14: 28; 16: 7; 1 Cor. 15: 6).

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The Fourth Part

The fourth portion of the Commission was given upon the last of the forty days, in Jerusalem and in some upper room there. Here the personnel narrows down from the five hundred to the eleven, from the mixed company of disciples to the select company of the apostles. And here, once more, the hearers are entirely Jewish (Mark 16: 14-18).

The Fifth Part

The fifth and last pronouncement of the Commission was made on Mount Olivet, over toward Bethany. It was while Christ was speaking that He was taken up into heaven. It was a sacred hour, made doubly so by the promise which Jesus breathed that He would come again. And those who were privileged to have the last look of the divine face and hear the last words of the divine voice were the eleven apostles, who were all Jews (Mark 16: 19; Luke 24: 50, 51; Acts 1: 1-12).

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CHAPTER VII

THE SUBJECT-MATTER ELEMENT

CLOSE observation of the five parts of the Commission, as they are related to one another, reveals the fact that Christ proceeded in His thought and expression from the particular to the general, the near to the far, the racial to the interracial, and the natural to the supernatural. There is an ever expanding element in the Saviour's five utterances, which must have carried His hearers—as it carries us—out of the small into the large, out of the low into the high, out of the visible into the invisible, out of the earthly into the heavenly. He began by saying, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21), which, strictly speaking, meant only to the Jews (Matt. 10: 5, 6; 15: 25, 26); He ended by saying, "Unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8), which meant to all the world and every creature in it (Mark 16: 15). Thus the Lord progressively revealed His true and full self, with the purpose of leading His hearers on and up to see as He saw, to feel as He felt, and to do as He had done. In other words, His Great Commission moved from the center to the circumference, that is, from Jerusalem to the uttermost bounds of the wide world, to which His Father

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had sent Him and for which He had died (John 3:16; Luke 24:45-48).

The First Part

The words, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21) have to do with character more than action. We mean by this that whatever action was to take place was to grow out of vital relationship to God. The Son was vitally related to His Father and hence He obeyed His command to go. The apostles and disciples were vitally related to the Son and hence they were to obey His command to go. The little phrase, "As . . . even so" (John 20:21) was the expression—except for deity—of a spiritual equation between Christ and themselves, and it established—except for that deity—an exact spiritual parallelism between Him and them. This emphasized the thought, not of what they were to do, but of what they were to be, for it was what they were to be which would determine what they were to do. This, in short, was Christian character, with which they would do as Christ did and without which they would not do as He did. In other words, Christ's first utterance, as He gave His Commission, looked Godward rather than manward. It brought His disciples to the great fundamental

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thought of the Commission, namely, that its origin was in God and that its fulfillment would depend upon what would be their relationship to Him.

The Second Part

When Christ said, "Ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48), He enunciated another fundamental truth, namely, that the apostles and disciples would be effective messengers to needy men only in the measure that they had doctrinal and experimental knowledge of God and witnessed of the facts which they knew. Christ thus laid His emphasis not upon refinement, culture, intellectualism, the learning of the schools, oratory, or any of the natural equipments upon which the Greeks and Romans had ever relied for the power of persuasive discourse, but rather upon their spiritual penetration into the divine mystery of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—and their spiritual determination to proclaim the gospel of God's grace, love, and power. This was the lesson which Paul so fully learned and which made him the marvelous missionary that he was (1 Cor. 2: 1-13; Gal. 1: 6-12). And this is the lesson which Christ required the apostles and all other disciples to learn if they were to be what he desired them to be and the world

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needed that they should be (Acts 2: 22-24; 3: 13-15; 4: 10-12). The word "witness" is from the Greek *martus*, which is the word from which we derive our English word martyr. This is suggestive, for the thought of martyrdom is at the heart of all true acts of witnessing, since testifying to Christ and salvation by grace alone means spiritual death to one's self and all natural conceptions of salvation, and may mean physical death at the hands of those who are antagonistic to the Saviour and His blood-wrought redemption (Acts 4: 1-3, 15-18; 5: 18, 29-33; 7: 54-60).

The Third Part

The message of the Lord delivered to the apostles and disciples in Galilee may be epitomized under two words "Go" (Matt. 28: 19) and "Lo" (Matt. 28: 20). That is, Christ's process was this: first, He commanded to go, and then He promised that His presence would empower. But the experimental order was the reverse of this. Luke expresses this thought as he records the words of our Lord which He uttered at His first appearing: "Ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24: 48); "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49). And this is the order

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which Christ has insisted upon as He has dealt with all succeeding generations of witnessing saints. It has always been possible, of course, to fulfil the command without obtaining the promise, but both the individual missionary and the collective church have found that such a procedure is the vainest of all spiritual vanities. We may safely say, as evidenced by this Galilean message, that Christ would rather have at His disposal for missionary service a little company of Spirit-filled disciples than a multitude of those who are not so filled. It is to be noted that the Lord assured the apostles and disciples that the necessary filling might be obtained, for He began His message with the assertion, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). It was in view of this promise of a divine presence and empowering that Christ dared to send forth such a little and feeble company of disciples to witness to all the world, and that those few and impotent followers of His dared to undertake the task assigned. The empowering implied that there was to be in their midst One who was infinite in resource and invincible in word and action. This was to be their and all others' sufficiency (Acts 2:33; 3:6, 12-15; 4:7-12, 19, 20).

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The Fourth Part

The message of Christ which had been spoken in Galilee at His second appearing was extensive, for it commanded the apostles and disciples to go forth and disciple all nations (Matt. 28: 19). His message spoken in Jerusalem, at His last appearing, was both extensive and intensive. It was extensive, because it sent forth the apostles into all the world and to every creature in it (Mark 16: 15). It was also intensive, because Christ declared to the apostles that He would follow their words and deeds by miraculous signs, which would be the divine attestation of their position, authority, and empowering (Mark 16: 17, 18). It is to be noted, in passing, that a sign, scripturally speaking, is not a frequent event, but an infrequent one; and further, it is to be observed that there is the less need now than in those early days for the physically miraculous, since God has put in our possession the spiritually miraculous by adding the divinely inspired New Testament to the Old. Nevertheless, Christ told the apostles that He was giving to them a supernatural task and hence was providing for them a supernatural evidencing. It was this promise which turned the impossible into the possible and which made the apostles the heroes of the

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faith which they were. This, then, was Christ's missionary method; the extensive would require the intensive, and the intensive would produce the extensive. And experience has justified the principle enunciated, for whenever and wherever this process has been taken and maintained the promised result has followed.

The Fifth Part

Christ's last declaration, spoken in His final interview with the apostles, was a summing up of what He had previously expressed and a detailed presentation of what He desired should be brought to pass. He reverted to the center of things, namely, Jerusalem, and then proceeded to the circumference, namely, the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). This makes manifest the fact that His heart's love was steadfastly fixed upon the Jews, for Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria were their territories; and also, that the same love was overflowing to the Gentiles, for the uttermost parts of the earth were their dwelling places. And it is manifest that He desired His disciples to be exactly like Himself, that is, consumed with love for all men, the near and the far, the chosen and the outcast. The apostles did not forget the divine program, for presently we find

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them scattered abroad, some in Judea, Samaria, and Syria, and others in far-away Rome, Spain, Babylon, and possibly India. Thus at once, the world at large began to feel the heart throb of the divine compassion, and to know that it was true that God would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2: 4). But alas! the last words of men have been more frequently remembered than the last words of our Lord Christ, and as a result, we of these later times have too generally lost our love and with it our vision, leaving both Jews and Gentiles to perish. And all the while, spiritually speaking, Christ remains standing on Olivet's brow and continues pleading, "Jerusalem . . . the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8).

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPECIAL-OBJECTIVE ELEMENT

IN considering the five parts of the Commission, we have sought to set forth their objectives. But our remarks have been of a general kind. Now, we shall endeavor to make manifest the more special objectives, that is, the major purposes of Christ in giving the Commission to us.

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The First Part

When Christ established His parallelism between Himself and His disciples (John 20:21), He opened, in a new sense, the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He himself, separately and solely, had satisfied the demands of divine justice and judgment in respect to sin. But He needed helpers if the good news of His salvation was to be proclaimed to sinful men. Without these, His atonement would remain unapplied; with them, it would prove, wherever it was accepted, universally efficacious. He chose and appointed, therefore, a body of missionaries, who would go forth even as He had done, from the light into the darkness, from the joy into the sorrow, from the gain into the loss, until needy men might know what He had wrought for them on Calvary's cross. Thus Christ threw the door of salvation wide open the world around, and bade men enter into the kingdom which was and was to be. The first part of the Commission, therefore, was an uncovering of the heart of God, the revealing of His infinite compassion, the making known of His illimitable grace. Henceforth, Christ would have His representatives go from one part of earth to another, telling everywhere and everyone that He had died and

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was risen and that man's redemption had been fully and forever secured. It was the act of a king who sends his heralds forth proclaiming pardon to all in his kingdom who are in rebellion against him but are willing to submit to him, only this was the act of the King of kings and Lord of lords in behalf of the whole human race. We may conclude then, that the first part of the Commission had as its special objective the making known of God as the One who had sent the Saviour and of the Saviour as the One who was seeking the lost (John 3: 16; Luke 19: 10; Acts 2: 38, 39; 4: 12; 1 Tim. 2: 4).

The Second Part

When Christ appointed His disciples to be witnesses unto Him, He established Christianity as a historic religion. He had come, lived, taught, died, had arisen from the grave, and was now appearing in resurrection form and power, all of which events His followers had seen and known. The apostles and others, therefore, were face to face with certain truisms, divinely purposed and fulfilled, and, as Luke tells us, these were "infallible proofs" of the reality of the things which pertained to the kingdom of God (Acts 1: 3). The implication of this was that God's heralds

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were not to preach themselves—their conceptions, their attainments, their emotions, their sacrifices, their sufferings—but only, as Paul afterwards expressed it, “Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2: 1, 2). Anything besides this, as the apostle declared, was not the gospel (Gal. 1: 6-8) and, as he affirmed, the man who pretended to preach the gospel but preached something else, no matter how learned, cultured, gracious, or eloquent he might be, was to be accursed (Gal. 1: 9). Christ then, by the use of the word “witnesses,” impressed upon the minds of His disciples that He was a historic personage, and that His gospel formulated a historic religion. In other words, they were to deal with facts, of which they had experimental knowledge. If they did not know these, they would be ruled out of God’s court. If they did, they could remain and testify. But they were to remember that they were to speak only of what they actually and certainly knew, nothing less and nothing more. When they should do this, as Paul assured them, they would find that the gospel was the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1: 16) and this because the Christ of the gospel was this power (Matt. 28: 18; 1 Cor. 1: 24). We may say then that the special objective of the second part of the Commission was to put Christ and His wit-

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nesses in their divinely appointed places, the One to be exalted as the glorious Lord and only Saviour (Acts 2: 32, 33; 4: 12), and the others to be given the simple and yet sublime task of being talebearers concerning Him. (Acts 1: 8; 2: 1-5).

The Third Part

It is clear that Christ's mandate, as recorded in Matthew 28: 18-20, was meant to be understood as the pronouncement of One who knew that He was "over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9: 5). In that utterance He first of all established His claim to deity (Matt. 28: 18), and then issued His requirement that divine honors should be paid to Him the world over and by every person in it, man, woman, and child (Matt. 28: 19, 20). Such assumptions as these could only come from One who was conscious of having come from God, of having fulfilled the will of God, and of being worthy of returning to God (John 13: 3; 17: 1-5). In other words, as Paul at a later time wrote, He wished His disciples to go forth with this glorious message, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5: 19). Also, this message was to be proclaimed to all the nations the world around

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(Matt. 28:19). We may say then that the special objective of the third part of the Commission is this, that Christ declared Himself to be, potentially, a universal Saviour, and the gospel, potentially, a universal message of salvation. It is to be noted, in addition, that teaching was to be added to preaching, which meant that systematic instruction was to be given wherever disciples should be made.

The Fourth Part

When Christ promised in the fourth part of the Commission that certain signs would follow the preaching of the gospel, He gave His messengers the assurance that He, though unseen, would be the ever-living presence in their midst (Mark 16:17, 18). He had said this in Galilee in the words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). But here He emphasized His promise by declaring that He would turn, through the signs, the invisible into the visible. They would not see Him, but they would see His works, and these doings of His would be the evidence of the fact that He was the Living One and, by the Spirit, was on earth as well as in heaven. This was the understanding that the apostles had of Christ's declara-

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tion concerning the signs (Acts 3:1-6); and, above all, it was the Holy Spirit's explanation of Christ's purpose in giving the signs, for He concludes Mark's Gospel by saying, "They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). Any true sign, therefore, whether in the physical or spiritual realm, is a confirmation of the truth that Christ lives and reigns, and that He is watching over and befriending those who have gone forth in His name. We may thus confidently assert that the special objective of this fourth part of the Commission is this, that the resurrection, ascension, glorification, and enthronement of Christ are glorious verities, upon which every missionary may fully and forever rely.

The Fifth Part

Christ, in the fifth part of His utterance, gives to His apostles and thus to His church the divine program of missions. They were to begin at Jerusalem, proceed through Judea, pass on into Samaria, and never pause until they had reached the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). His conception of the case was that all the world needed Him, and His desire and pur-

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pose were that all the world should have Him. He gave to His messengers, therefore, a divine message, and longed that it might be within them a divine urge which would make them restless with long tarryings and eager for long journeyings. Where men were He wanted His heralds to go, north, south, east, and west, until all the world and every creature should know that He was the Saviour of the lost. We may say, therefore, that the special objective of this fifth part of the Commission is this, that the church was forever to be a moving body of men and women who should go farther and farther away from every near-at-hand Jerusalem, until the uttermost rim of the world's great need should be reached and met.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMMISSION AS A WHOLE

IN the previous chapters we have regarded the Great Commission in respect to its several parts. Herewith, we desire to join these parts together and consider them as a whole. This will bring into view the complete mandate of our Lord, and help us the better to realize what are its implications and requirements. Putting then, the five

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parts together, we have the Commission in its totality, as follows:

“As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

“Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak

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with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

"We shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

It is now our purpose to consider the Commission as it stands in combination and unity, and to deduce from it certain major lessons which it presents. In doing this we shall number the paragraphs in order that their statements may the more easily be understood and remembered.

1. It is evident from the Commission that Christ occupies a twofold relationship to His church; He is her Saviour and also her Lord (Acts 5: 31; 2 Pet. 2: 20).

2. As the Saviour of the church, having bought her by His precious blood (1 Pet. 1: 18, 19), He owns her and all she possesses (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20).

3. As the Lord of the church, being her sole and full Head, He has the unequivocal and

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eternal right of saying what she shall not and shall do (Matt. 4: 19, 20; 8: 21, 22; 9: 9; 16: 24-27).

4. When Christ has commanded His church to do this or that, her bounden duty is to give immediate, explicit and perpetual obedience to Him and His command (Acts 20: 22-24; 26: 15-20).

5. It is not within the province of any member of the church to say, "I do not believe in this or that command and I do not choose to obey it." He may do this if he will; but if he does, it will be considered by God as high treason, and he will have to take the consequences, both in time and eternity, of his disloyal act (Rom. 14: 10-12; 1 Cor. 3: 9-15; 4: 1-2; 2 Cor. 5: 10; 1 John 2: 28).

6. If then, we understand that Christ has commanded us to evangelize the world, we are not at liberty to say, "I do not believe in foreign missions." Our Master does, and our sacred obligation is to believe in what He believes in (Matt. 28: 19; Mark 16: 15; 1 Cor. 9: 16, 17).

7. Moreover, we are called upon to show our faith by our works (James 2: 17, 18), and thus to do, whole-heartedly and sacrificially, all that God makes possible for us in getting the gospel to the lost (1 Cor. 9: 19-23; 2 Cor. 11: 23-28).

8. It is to be noted that Christ does not com-

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mand us to convert the world; He commands us to evangelize it (Mark 16: 15). Even Paul, the greatest of all missionaries, found that he, as he preached the gospel, was a savor of "death unto death" as well as one of "life unto life" (2 Cor. 2: 16). Nevertheless, he obeyed (Acts 26: 19, 20). And the apostle, almost single-handed, Christ working with him, turned the world upside down (Acts 17: 6). And what Paul did, we are to do, leaving the issues with the One whose command we determine to obey.

9. But it must not be thought that obeying the Lord's command to disciple the nations (Matt. 28: 19) is a forlorn hope, and that its results will be negligible. It has not been so in the past and will not be so in the future. John, by the divine Spirit, lifts the veil from before our eyes and gives us to see the outcome of evangelization: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Rev. 7: 9). This is what obeying Christ has meant and will mean.

10. Evangelizing the world, as James and Peter put it, means, God visiting the Gentiles, and the implication of this is that we are to go

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visiting with Him (Acts 15:14). This is high companionship and sublime occupation, and the one and other are a sufficient incitement for any soul which is large enough to conceive of things as they are. Besides, Christ adds His individual promise of companionship in the solacing words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). This indicates that He, personally, will be the guide, guard, and comforter of every man who dares to fare forth with Him. And suppose one is asked to be a martyr (Luke 24:48, Gk.), either through the long years of a far-away, hidden and forgotten life, or in the short moment of a sudden and violent death, what matters it? Paul, who had passed through the whole experience of a missionary's career, said, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). He was persuaded, therefore, that loss, living or dying, was impossible. And thus it will be with any one who will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Rom. 8:16-18; Rev. 22:12).

11. The Commission looks toward the coming of Christ. It is to be noted that the translations given in the Authorized and Revised Versions of Christ's words in Matthew 28:20, "Even unto the end of the world," are incorrect and unfortunate. Christ, as He spoke, did not have in

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view the end of the world, but the end of the present age, beyond which lay another age, namely, the millennial. The Revised Version corrects the mistranslation by a note in the margin, which reads, "The consummation of the age." This is exactly correct. And the correction thus made indicates the thing of which the Master spoke, namely, His return to earth, for the end of the age and His return are coincident events. But Christ, in another Scripture, made it plain that there was a preparatory work which was to lead up to this consummation. We refer to Matthew 24: 14. In this passage the Master replied to the disciples who had inquired as to the sign of His coming and the end of the age. And He said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24: 14). In other words, the order of events was this: first, the evangelization, and then the kingdom. Here, then, is a splendid task for any man, however great he may be, more splendid by far than the tasks of kings and presidents, of world courts, or league of nations. Paul got a vision of its greatness and glory, for he said, "We are *ambassadors* for Christ, as though *God* did beseech you by us" (2 Cor. 5: 20). The apostle, beside such a position and mission, considered

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every earthly honor as paltry—mere “dung” (Phil. 3:8-14—if only he might finish his course with joy and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). And this is the calling wherewith Christ calls every one of us as He commands us to rise up and follow Him. It is to be kept in mind that He will ask hard tasks of us. But it is to be remembered that He will go before us, and will guide, guard, and comfort us. And when, at last, He comes, one look into His beatific face will make us forget, once and forever, that we ever sacrificed or suffered anything here below. For in that hour our rapturous joy will be in realizing how great was our privilege in having some little part in bringing back to earth so mighty, glorious, and beneficent a King.

12. The Commission makes it plain that the work assigned by Christ to the church will, at last, be accomplished. The passage in Acts 1:8 is the evidence of this, for its words are not so much a command as a prophecy. The members of the church may be laggards and the progress may be slow; but the Lord is with the missionary advance guard, and, though He may not be able to work through the many, He will work through the few. There is no such thing, there-

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fore, as bringing to naught the purpose of God. What will happen if we fail to come to His help against the mighty, is, not that He will be defeated, but rather, that we shall not be sharers in His victory. For Christ, in any event, will win the conquest, when God will show "who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6: 15). "Ye *shall* be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 8). Christ said it, and no one in heaven, earth, or hell can nullify this His triumphant word. Let us therefore, whatever the cost, go forth with Him, following in His glorious train, conquering and to conquer!

COMMISSIONED

Out from the realm of the glory-light
Into the far-away land of night;
Out from the bliss of worshipful song
Into the pain of hatred and wrong;
Out from the holy rapture above
Into the grief of rejected love;
Out from the life at the Father's side
Into the death of the crucified;
Out of high honor and into shame,
The Master willingly, gladly came:—

And now, since He may not suffer anew,
As the Father sent Him, so sendeth He you!

